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AUTOMATED OUTAGE REPORTING
1-888-BLURIDGE

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P.O. Box 277
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Pickens, SC 29671

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2328 Sandifer Blvd.
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MISSION STATEMENT
Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative will operate as a competitive provider of energy services and a partner with local communities, with a focus on safety, service and integrity.

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This organization is an
equal-opportunity provider.



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



“Blue Ridge
is blessed to
be serving
some of
the finest
people in
the world.”

A storm to remember

AS BLUE RIDGE ELECTRIC enters 2025, we're still confronted with ample evidence of the most impactful event ever to come our way. On my daily commute to and from the co-op office, I see signs of the devastated landscape left in the wake of Hurricane Helene. Roadside brush piles, mighty trees uprooted and lying on the ground and severely damaged homes and other structures are still common sights.

The cooperative's response to this historic storm, which resulted in 90% of our members losing power, was to marshal all the resources we possibly could to attack the restoration process. More than 600 operations employees representing 15 of our sister co-ops—some from as far away as South Dakota—joined in the massive repair effort. Our on-site employees and contract workers swelled the total number of crew members to more than 800.

One stark indicator of the severity of this storm was the final count of nearly 1,000 broken wood poles recorded on the Blue Ridge system. That statistic is significant for any number of reasons. Here are two I'd mention:

- ▶ That number is three times the number of broken wood poles that were counted some years ago in what had been, up until Helene, our worst storm emergency.
- ▶ The replacement of a broken pole typically requires the labor of four linemen and takes about four times as long to address, compared to an outage that doesn't involve a broken pole.

Those are only a couple of factors that made this a weather event to remember. Other major challenges were the feeding, housing and supplying of an army of workers. Those were also monumental tasks.

Ultimately, we were able to restore service to the majority of our members in less than 12 days. However, there were a couple of communities in the northernmost sections of the Blue Ridge territory that were especially hard hit. So much destruction was inflicted on our facilities in these locations that crews had to build long stretches of new power lines just to get those folks back in service. The lights finally came on again for them on the 14th day.

In the aftermath of this challenging system-wide situation, we've received so many comments from members expressing praise and gratitude for the tremendous effort that brought this massive outage to an end. I am grateful for each of you who took the opportunity to contact us.

While the level of devastation was apparent, we still agonized over the fact that many of you were doing without this essential service. On previous occasions, I've noted that Blue Ridge is blessed to be serving some of the finest people in the world. Your collective positive response to our performance this time around serves to reinforce that conviction.

JIM LOVINGGOOD
President and CEO



A drone was used to pull wire across areas that were inaccessible by truck. Without these “mobile linemen,” recovery time would have been longer.



PHOTOS BY RILEY MORNINGSTAR

In the Rocky Bottom area, every power pole was broken or leaning due to torrential rain and high winds.

Hurricane Helene causes historic devastation

PRIOR TO THE PAST few years, Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative members have often been leery of weather reports that predict ice and snow for the area. While ice and snow are always a concern for the cooperative, recent storm statistics show that three of the weather events causing the worst damage to our area were from a tornado and two hurricanes.

However, nothing can measure up to the total devastation to our electrical system caused by Hurricane Helene, which brought unprecedented rain and wind to the Upstate. Almost 90% of our 73,000 members were without power after the storm passed. It took a Herculean effort to restore the majority of power to members in 12 days or less. But for the remote area of Rocky Bottom, it required 59 men working 14 days to rebuild two and a half miles of power line to turn the lights back on.

When people in Pickens County speak of Rocky Bottom, you think of an unspoiled mountainous area with beautiful views and seasonal homes. Located below Sassafras Mountain, Rocky Bottom is home to Camp McCall, Camp Hannon and Carolina Point, along with almost 200 permanent and vacation homes. It is also a thoroughfare from South Carolina to North Carolina. With 14 to 20 inches of rain reported in the area, high winds left every pole either broken or leaning, the worst damage of any area on our system.

“This was the worst damage I’ve seen anywhere,” says Senior Vice President Mark Waters. “Every pole had to be replaced, and we even used drones to pull wire across some of the steep gorges.”

Blue Ridge Electric appreciates all the crews that assisted during the reconstruction effort.



Helene’s high winds caused devastating damage along the scenic roads in the Rocky Bottom area, making travel dangerous for emergency vehicles and utility trucks.

BY THE NUMBERS

How the worst storms in recent history compare.

2005 Ice Storm

- ▶ 78 Circuits Out
- ▶ 53,465 Members Out
- ▶ 276 Broken Poles
- ▶ 7 Days

2017 Irma

- ▶ 55 Circuits Out
- ▶ 44,850 Members Out
- ▶ 180 Broken Poles
- ▶ 5 Days

2020 EF3 Tornado

- ▶ 66 Circuits Out
- ▶ 41,556 Members Out
- ▶ 247 Broken Poles
- ▶ 5 Days

2024 Helene

- ▶ 144 Circuits Out
- ▶ 64,917 Members Out
- ▶ 959 Broken Poles
- ▶ 14 Days